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THE ROLE  
OF THE MISSIONARY  
in  
JAPAN



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of  
THE REFORMED CHURCH in AMERICA  
in  
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ENDORSED: in so far as reference  
is made to the United Church in  
Japan

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## The Role of the Missionary in Japan

From the day Christ commissioned His disciples "to go into all the world", the greatest problem which has continually confronted Christians throughout the centuries is that of the evangelization of the millions who are not believers in Christ. This mission, given equally to all Christendom, can never be correctly considered the exclusive mission of any national or denominational group. That due to the human limitations of personnel, ability and means, or because of man-made geographical and political barriers, all Christendom does not equally share in the actual implementation of this mission in all parts of the world at any given juncture in history is not denied. These human factors, however, in no way alter the nature and scope of the task which Christ gave to His followers. The imperfections evident in Christendom's carrying out of the mission are due to human limitations and are not inherent in the commission itself.

The implementation of this mission generally has been divided into two major parts; namely, domestic missions, principally used to designate missions within the boundaries of one's own country or continent, and foreign missions, principally used to designate the task of evangelism when it involves going to a foreign country. This division of the task has given rise to the concept that domestic missions is the exclusive concern of the church or churches within the geographical boundaries of a country or continent, while foreign missions is the exclusive concern of the older churches with the means and personnel to go to lands where there is no church.

By this artificial division, we have permitted national and denominational boundaries to determine the scope and context within which we discuss our obedience to the commission of Christ, rather than making our

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obedience to Christ and His commands the context within which we discuss the task of missions in relation to the world in which we are called to witness. Some question the wisdom of continuing to maintain missionaries in Japan since a National Church exists. Those who raise this question feel that Japan can no longer be regarded a "foreign mission field", but has become a "domestic mission field" with the subsequent conclusion that the churches in Japan should assume responsibility for the evangelization of unbelievers in Japan.

For those holding this point of view, the presence of a National Church and the artificial division of our task into foreign and domestic spheres are the two primary factors involved in discussing obedience to the command to evangelize with regards to the land of Japan. The extent of the population unevangelized and the limited means of the National Churches to adequately face this situation are facts not brought into proper focus.

Japan is a major mission field. The Christian forces in Japan are faced with the gigantic task of evangelizing over 90 million unbelievers. Added to the burden of this task is the fact that Christians in Japan today represent a smaller percentage of the total population than they did thirty years ago. This is a discouraging fact, and although reasons can be set forth in partial explanation of this fact, none of them can adequately explain this loss of ground.

The need for missionary activity has in no way diminished. On the contrary, it has been increasing yearly. We here much of changing times and movements. Obedience to the command of Christ to go and evangelize is an unchanging factor which must be recognized as such. This task cannot be circumscribed by any world changes or by concepts of organization within the body of the Church. It follows that the question of "who is to do this missionary work?" is secondary to the actual doing

of the task. The task is the same whether it is done by nationals or foreigners. The task has to be done by men and women who are called of God to the task. Race, creed or nationality have no primary consideration in moving forward in obedience to the commission given to the saints.

There is little validity in attempting to divide the task into spheres of primary and secondary responsibility. The task of missions is primary to any church that feels the call to do mission work in any given area, be that area contiguous to the church or at a distance, separated by land or sea. It is primary regardless of the location, race, creed or nationality of the church which at that moment is the instrument of God in proclaiming the message of salvation.

The call to the task of missions and the actual task of missions cannot truly be measured by comparisons. However, in order to more clearly present the task of missions as it challenges all Christendom from Japan today, it seems necessary to make some comparisons. A comparison will be made between the United Church of Christ in Japan and the Reformed Church in America in the matters of finance and personnel. The United Church of Christ is chosen from the churches in Japan for two reasons. First, it is the church with which Reformed Church missionaries assigned to Japan are working. Second, the total membership of this church is about the same as that of the Reformed Church. The United Church of Christ is divided into geographical areas somewhat similar to the Particular Synods of the Reformed Church. Each of these Synods is also divided into smaller districts.

Recently the Synod of Kyushu made a study of the giving of its church members. It was estimated that the average yearly income of its church members was Yen 80,000, which converted into dollars equals \$222.22. The yearly contribution by these Christians to the church

amounted to Yen 3,050, which converted into dollars equals \$8.47. Because of the number of students with little income and the number of wives who must squeeze their contributions from money allotted to them for house expenses by their non-believing husbands, we consider this a high estimate. But even if we accept this figure, the average percentage of income contributed to the church for all purposes was 3.8%. If we apply this same percentage to the average income of the members of the Reformed Church in America, we are staggered by the total possible income of the Reformed Church.

We draw this comparison simply to demonstrate, in as clear a manner as possible, that lack of giving on the part of the individual Japanese Christians cannot be charged against them. We do not feel that Christians in Japan are lacking in zeal with regards to monetary contributions supporting the church and its mission. From a monetary point of view, the problem is simply that there are not enough Christians to adequately support and maintain the church's mission to over 90 million unbelievers.

A second area in which comparison can be made is that of personnel. Our Reformed Church is not able to find sufficient ministers to fill all our pulpits. In fact, the question has been raised within the Reformed Church as to whether we should continue to engage in expansion work within the United States and to urge the recruiting of more men for an expanding program overseas when we are not able to supply all the existing pulpits. The United Church of Christ is faced with the problem of not only filling existing pulpits and keeping them filled, but of raising up men to reach out through evangelistic projects to the unevangelized millions. We wonder what the response and reaction of the Reformed Church would be if it were confronted today with the task of proclaiming the Gospel to over 90 million unbelievers. When we think of the



United Church of Christ, having probably less than 5% of the financial resources of our own Church, would we not conclude that it faces an impossible task? Under such circumstances it is not strange that the United Church of Christ in Japan has repeatedly asked for more ordained missionaries to meet this gigantic task.

What then of the missionary and his work and life in Japan? The essential factor, the greatest factor, is and must always be the sense of call and mission to give one's life to evangelization in Japan. We do not believe this can be relegated to a secondary position or taken for granted. It must be a compelling, irresistible conviction if the missionary is going to be able to serve properly, to say nothing concerning the grave and disturbing consequences which will follow his arrival in Japan if he comes with any other concept. In other words, as leaders of the Church in Japan have repeatedly expressed it, the missionary must come with the purpose and conviction that he desires, God willing, to have his "ashes buried in Japanese soil". To come with any conviction less than stated above only assures years of misunderstanding, loss of direction and distress on all sides.

The Church in Japan is asking for consecrated men and women who desire to serve a lifetime, for better or for worse, in season and out of season, in success and in failure, so long as God in His infinite providence grants them the privilege of serving. All factors of the task in Japan point to the soundness of this position.

The Church in Japan has not at any time circumscribed the sense of mission of the missionary. The new missionary coming to Japan is asked what type of mission work his call compels him to pursue, and the Church makes every effort to assign the missionary to an area where this work can be undertaken. In every category of work, the task is so great

and compelling, the laborers so few that the only urgent necessity is to get to work. In this the Church has assured its full cooperation and backing. This applies in Education, Church Extension, Personal Evangelism, Sunday School Work, Newspaper Evangelism, Youth Evangelism, Industrial Evangelism or any other type of evangelism a missionary may feel called to do. In all of this, the Church does not propose to tell the missionary what he has come to do. The Church leaders have consistently maintained that they desire to aid the missionary in carrying out his mission along the lines he feels his abilities and his call lead him. On the local level, where the work is actually carried out, the pastors of the area directly affected by the missionary's presence and work, desire to have a voice in planning the work program. That at times there will be differences of opinion as to how the missionary can best carry out his work is inevitable. However, these differences of opinion are not an attempt on the part of the Church to circumscribe the sense of mission of the missionary. They are honest differences of opinion, born out of different experiences in evangelism, education and cultural background.

The Church in Japan has never undertaken to be comprehensively responsible for the missionary's total life and work. The Church leaders give many reasons why they cannot undertake a total responsibility now or in the near future. To avoid misunderstanding at this point it is necessary to recognize that there is a difference between assuming responsibility for the missionary and inviting a person to serve as a missionary. It is only natural that the Church leaders desire to be consulted regarding the work of the missionary who accepts their invitation to come. It is natural that they seek to enjoy the missionary's full cooperation and understanding. In turn the missionary is assured of every backing the Church can give. The fact remains, however,



that the Church has never undertaken the total responsibility for the missionary's life and work. To do so would mean that the Church in Japan would replace the Mission Board in most of its responsibilities. By not demanding or assuming this, the Church in Japan is consistent, for it has not demanded an authority over the missionary for which it cannot carry the concomitant assumption of full responsibility.

It is important to realize that the circumstances of relationship between the missionary and the Church vary from time to time and from place to place. For example, each school has its own policies and personnel. No one pattern can be laid down for all missionary teachers. It is up to each missionary to make such adjustments as will make it possible for him or her to serve most effectively in view of the existing situation in the school at any given time and the personalities involved. These cannot be determined for or dictated to the missionary by anyone or any group not directly involved in the day to day situation.

This is true in every other field of mission activity. Concepts and the resultant policies change with time and people. At times the change is very rapid. Perhaps in no area of work is this more true than in direct evangelism. Here two factors interplay upon each other. First is the varying mood of the people one is trying to evangelize. This can change rapidly in direct relationship to changing economic, political and social conditions. Second, a great deal depends on the leaders of the Particular Synod and the local districts. Not only do the concepts and attitudes of the various Synods vary, but so also do those of the local districts in which the evangelistic missionary is most closely allied with his Japanese brethren in reaching out to the unbelievers. Here too, no single pattern can be set forth which will do justice to all missionaries and all situations. It is absolutely necessary for the

missionary to make such adjustments as become essential to bring effectiveness to his work on the local level. Such adjustment cannot be made from a distance. The Church in Japan recognizes this and gives the missionary ample freedom to make such adjustments. Christians in America must recognize this fact and likewise be ready to give the necessary freedom to their missionaries to make adjustments at the point of contact which are necessary for getting on with the work Christ has entrusted to His Church.

It follows from the above, that the missionary's relationship to the Church becomes more detailed and specific as one moves from the Central Headquarters to the Particular Synod and finally to the district. The Central Headquarters of the church is concerned primarily with the over-all, general relationships. The Particular Synod is concerned with the actual placement of the missionary in one of its districts and through its committees tries to maintain a broad framework within which the missionary can be established to do a really effective piece of work, primarily within the local area, but also from time to time in other places within the jurisdiction of the Synod.

It is in the district in which the missionary lives and serves that we first encounter the more detailed and practical aspects of his life and work. It is here that the missionary must adjust himself not only to the local conditions, but to a variety of personalities. The converse is also true, for it is here that the local pastors and church people must adjust themselves to the presence of the missionary. As stated before, the personal outlook, desires and goals of the pastors and laymen are different in each district. The background of the people in each district is also different. Because of this it seems logical to conclude that every policy, plan and action, on all levels should be formulated and carried out so as to be of aid to

the churches, pastors, and missionary on the district level where the actual work is being done. Experience indicates that assigning an ordained missionary to a single church which has its own pastor, tends to create unnatural problems and makes the utilization of the missionary's abilities for the best interest of the total district more difficult.

Since the evangelistic missionary is not assigned directly to a church, it may seem that he has no base from which to do an effective piece of evangelism. Such a conclusion is based on the belief that only from a pastoral position can an effective piece of evangelism be undertaken. It seems necessary to point out that while the two are closely related, they are in fact distinct functions of the ministry. In order to be successful in our missionary work, we must maintain a distinction between the pastoral function of the ministry and the work of a missionary. Only as we maintain a careful distinction will we be able to closely coordinate them. Much confusion and lost motion results when these distinctions are lost. This seems especially true in Japan, where since the end of the war, only occasionally has a missionary served as pastor of a specific church. It should be stated that when a missionary has served as the pastor of a church, it has been at the specific request of the ministers of that district, feeling that the missionary could make the greatest contribution in that capacity. Just as a distinction is maintained between the function of the Christian educator and pastor, so must the distinction between the pastoral and missionary functions be maintained. Within the Reformed Church this division of function is recognized by calling those who go from area to area, canvassing and establishing new churches, classical or synodical missionaries. Unless called by the new group to become their pastor, in which case he ceases to be the classical mis-

sionary, the missionary moves on to a new field when the church is ready for a pastor.

While all the functions of evangelism are designed to lead into the church, and are carried out in support of the church, they are not pastoral functions. It follows that the techniques employed in evangelism are not those used in the pastoral relationship. Thus the life and process of work of the missionary is a particular type of labor, and though at times similar to that of the pastor, it should not be confused with the life and work of the pastor. It needs only to be added that the call of the Church in Japan to churches abroad is not for pastors for the churches in Japan, but for missionaries.

Why does the Church in Japan call for more missionaries? The clear answer is that there is so much missionary work to be done that all the resources and manpower of both the Church in Japan and the Church abroad cannot fully meet the need today. This being true, it is not a question of how many missionaries should be sent to Japan, but how many with a sense of call can be found and sent in answer to the church's plea.

What of the Church and the missionary's relationship to it? The situation is such that the United Church of Christ in Japan needs no one to defend it nor does it fear any imposition on the part of missionaries or missions. The quality of leaders at all levels is such that there is no need to be anxious regarding the life and function of the church. The question of the autonomy of the Church was settled many years ago. The Church in Japan needs no aid in ecclesiastical affairs. It is independent and self-governing, and has been for many years.

A missionary is at once a person with two home churches, and yet a person with no home church, for in a sense he is not an active

participant in the ecclesiastical life of the church which sends him or of the church to which he has been sent. In an effort to solve this dilemma it has been advocated that since the missionary is a part of the National Church, he is to find his ecclesiastical life within that National Church. It is necessary to discuss at some length this concept as it relates to Japan. When this assertion is made by the Western mind, it carries certain connotations which must be set forth. For example, the American Church has many ministers coming directly from Europe to serve in various capacities within the church. In the Reformed Church, a minister from the Netherlands becomes a full member of Classis and in turn becomes president of Classis. He could hold any other position without question, including that of Stated Clerk. He would be able to perform any ecclesiastical function required of him.

When we project the life of the missionary in terms of his serving in the Japanese Church, we naturally interpret this in terms of our own church's attitudes and actions in dealing with ministers from other lands. When missionaries are told that they are to find their ecclesiastical life in and under the Japanese Church, it is virtually impossible for them to envision any other relationship than that of their own church in America. Yet, at the present time, and in the foreseeable future, no such position is open to the missionary in Japan. It cannot be over-emphasized that this is not the fault of the Japanese Church or the fault of the missionary. Nor can it be laid to a lack of Christian charity and grace on the part of either party.

There are very clear reasons why the American concept and way of doing things cannot be transferred either in thought or actuality to the situation in Japan. Two of the factors contributing to this situation are the very great difference in cultural background—a difference which does not exist between Europe

and America, and a lack of knowledge on the part of the missionary concerning a host of complicated customs and mores which combine to make up the society and culture of these highly developed and educated people. Added to these is the very real and great problem of language. Setting aside all other reasons for the moment, there is the fact that no missionary living in Japan today could function effectively in most of the offices in the ecclesiastical organization of the church. For example, what missionary could effectively serve as the Stated Clerk of the Synod or Classis? Missionaries simply do not have sufficient ability in reading and writing the Japanese language to qualify for a position of minister in the church in the sense that we understand this term. Or what missionary serving today in Japan, in humility, can honestly claim to be able to conduct the business session of the Synod or district? Let it be clearly stated again, this is not because of a lack of Christian love, understanding or grace on the part of either the Japanese Church or the missionary. It is simply a fact of life

It also could be pointed out that it would be virtually impossible for a missionary to vote consistently as a member of Synod. He might vote consistently when voice votes are in order, but on the occasion of a written ballot, which is often the case, requiring the writing of a dozen or more names, there simply is not ample time to consider the men available, determine the proper way to write the Chinese characters of their names so that no mistake will be made in the recording of the vote and then write the names. Many other examples supporting the above contention could be cited, but simply to pile example upon example seems unnecessary. Sufficient has been cited to show the impossibility of a missionary functioning in the ecclesiastical offices of the Church in the manner deduced by the Western mind from its own experiences.



What then is the status of the missionary in the Japanese Church now and in the foreseeable future? Perhaps the best way to describe it is that of a visiting minister. By use of this term it is not implied that a missionary is here only temporarily, but that he remains in a special category. We have only praise for the church and its leaders in according the missionary this status of visitor or guest. It exemplifies a great deal of patience and forgiveness on their part. According to the prepared plan, a certain number of missionary representatives are accorded the right to vote in the Particular and General Synod meetings. The missionary has been granted the right of the floor in spite of the numbers of times when the missionary's exercise of this privilege has temporarily stalled the proceedings.

The missionary's ordination is accepted without question and entitles him to administer the sacraments of the church, thus making possible full ministerial authority over spiritual matters. On occasions the church honors the missionary far beyond that justified by his language ability. We feel that any true evaluation of the church's reception of the missionary will prove to be a satisfactory one. As a corollary, we feel that as long as the missionary understands his position as a guest of the church in this sense, with its privileges and patterns of operation, he will find a wonderful opportunity to serve. He will find also that he is free to devote his time to spiritual activities, the reward of which is beyond all other rewards. It is true, and must be understood by all who would come, that they will not realize these rewards the day after landing in Japan or perhaps not even during their introductory term of five years. During that time they may well catch only glimpses of the great and rewarding opportunities existing in Japan.

The question must now be asked, since the missionary is a guest, what position can he expect to occupy in the church and her functions?

The answer to this question must start with the simple assertion that this will vary with each missionary, his time and place of service, his abilities, and the understanding and Christian grace he brings to his task. This can never be determined by the sending Board or by any legislated policy on the field. The missionary will reach and settle at the level of his capacities and spiritual growth, in the same manner that he would in the home church. It must be emphasized that this level will not be reached during the first term of service any more than the first pastorate at home indicates the upper level of a minister's possible attainment. Every young missionary should also realize that the advance in stature before the church is far more rapid at home. However, as at home, the missionary will find reward in his labors in direct proportion to the consecrated work actually done.

We might illustrate the missionary task in Japan, to which the missionary comes, by comparing it to an enormous mountain of coal. A pitifully small handful of workers are trying to move this mountain of coal with shovels. The missionary who comes to help is asked simply to take off his shirt, grab a shovel and work with those already at work. Any missionary who will do this is most welcome. To stand with folded arms, making suggestions how the work can be done faster and more efficiently without bending the back to help, is no help at all. The missionary who comes to tell others how to do the task had better not come. Only the missionary who will roll up his sleeves and dig into the task at hand, learning from those already at work, sharing with them as he grows in experience and knowledge will find a welcome.

In a discussion of the missionary's role in Japan we must also come to grips with some concrete elements of the work. The first of these is of prime importance. It must be emphasized very strongly that a missionary is called to

Japan to do missionary work and not because he can do a task some well-trained Japanese cannot do. There is not, and we repeat the not for emphasis, there is not one task of any kind being performed by missionaries in Japan to-day that a trained Japanese cannot do. This point cannot be overemphasized. Yet it has been asserted that missionaries should do only those things which trained nationals cannot do. If this assertion is correct, it is not right to send young men and women to Japan for missionary service. The character and level of education and ability found in the church and among its leaders is of such a nature that every type of task can be undertaken and well-handled by a Japanese with suitable training.

However, it is of the very nature of the task of the missionary, that no trained national, no matter how well-trained he may be, can perform the task of the foreign missionary. In a very real sense this has nothing to do with actual training. The presence of the missionary working side by side with the national leaders and laymen speaks of our oneness in Christ in a manner that words can never do. We speak of brothers in Christ, of sharing in our common Christian task, of there being neither Jew nor Greek, Japanese or American. Yet by asserting that missionary work is limited to what trained nationals cannot do, even though it is done under the expediency of secular pressures, we destroy the very image of the brotherhood we profess. We allow a national boundary, a political division to become the primary basis for determining the extent of our obedience to Christ's command to evangelize. Our thinking becomes so colored by this fact that we forget that first and foremost a missionary is called of God. The very nature of his call compels him to go in spite of the fact that others may misinterpret his mission. As long as God opens the doors for the missionary to fulfill his call, the missionary must go. He cannot fulfill his own call by supplying the means for a trained national to take his place.

This leads to an observation which we believe to be valid. Once the primacy of the missionary task of the Church is accepted, there will be little cause for concern in the relations between nationals and the missionary, methods, processes and other aspects of the implementation of missionary work. There may be personality clashes on occasion. The mission of the church may be misinterpreted by those outside of the church. However, the church as such will move on with the task in great cooperation and expectation.

This seems very evident from the situation in Japan where the majority of church leaders continually repudiate the idea that it would be more effective for the American Church to send money instead of missionaries. Continually they ask for more missionaries. They find it hard to understand why the need for missionaries is continually debated by both missionaries and the various sending Boards. Their quiet, continued requests exemplify a very high degree of patience and vision.

But this leads directly into another problem. If the Church in Japan is considered to be the body to take the lead in making plans, and if the missionaries are to work under and through this Church, why are its requests repeatedly questioned or even side-tracked? The task of missions in Japan is beyond the capacity of the Church, both in means and personnel. This is through no fault of its own. The Church in Japan feels led to ask the Church abroad for missionaries in order to be able to get on with the task. The reason for these requests is the fact that God has opened doors to all who feel called of Him to do mission work in Japan.

At this, the beginning of the second century of modern Christian work in Japan, a moratorium should be called on such useless questioning of the need for missionaries. A firm commitment to get on with the task should come to the fore. Similarly, when a missionary has made his adjustment with the church at

the working level, his every move should not be held in question. He should receive the backing of his sending Board the same as he receives the backing of the Church in Japan. If the policies determined in America are contrary to and out of step with the working policies hammered out through the sweat and tears of actual field experience, the missionary will be placed in an impossible situation. If he makes the necessary adjustments to the local situation which permit him to carry on evangelism in a manner in keeping with the expressed needs of the Church in Japan and in keeping with his vows of ordination, he will find himself at variance with policy declared in America. If he follows the policies decided in America, his position on the field will become untenable.

It seems logical to feel that the policy which should be followed is the time-proven policy of appointing men to do missionary work in whom the confidence of the Board, as representing the Church, can rest. For such a missionary, a rigid set of do's and don'ts will not be necessary. Ample freedom will be granted so that adjustments on the field can be made in order to facilitate the ongoing work of the Kingdom. Men and women who do not warrant such confidence should not be appointed to missionary service.

Missionaries, because of the nature of their work, have from the beginning been optimistic, minimizing the difficulties of their work. In raising these issues, we do not stand at the crying wall. We raise these questions because we feel they are basic to the future work of missions, not only in Japan, but in all sectors of the world. Japan is perhaps the most difficult of any field in the world. The level of education, the character and culture of the people coupled with the language creates tremendous problems. In facing such a situation, no missionary should be in doubt as to the backing of his sending Board. He should not feel that

what he does will be questioned as though he has sought to gain personal ends, even though it is done at the request of the Church to which he has been assigned for work. He should not have to feel that any remarks he may make concerning mission policies will be treated and interpreted as made by one blinded by the limited nature of the district in which he works.

In light of the foregoing discussion of the role of the missionary in present day Japan, we desire those in authority to recognize that the Japanese Church and its leaders are able to perform every task required by missionary work in Japan. We desire that these authorities recognize that they are sending missionaries to Japan, not to do work that trained nationals cannot do, but to do missionary work which God has called them to do. This call is recognized by the request of the United Church of Christ in Japan to come and help them do missionary work which the Church is incapable of doing because of limited means and personnel. We desire that those in authority recognize there are problems and relationships of a local nature which the missionary alone must meet in order to carry out his assigned task. We desire that these authorities accord the missionaries assigned to Japan their complete backing, and their confidence in the work they perform at the district level on request of the Church in Japan.

The history of the representatives of the Reformed Church in Japan is such that we have every reason to believe that the appointees of our Board are able to and will uphold the best traditions of the Reformed faith as they work in and through the United Church of Christ in Japan.